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Pamphlet No. 6

WHY UNIONS GO SMASH!

*Certain Dangerous Trends in American
Trade Unionism and What Is to Be Done*

By JAMES ONEAL

Introduction by
J. B. S. HARDMAN

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NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
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LABOR ACTION

STEEL WORKERS



Once members of a strong craft union, now struggling for survival.

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INTRODUCTION

In this pamphlet the story is told of three important American national unions which met with great adversities. This story, told by James Oneal, author of "The Workers in American History," ought to be read and studied, by every thinking American working man and woman. Of the three unions one went out of existence, one is fighting with its back to the wall, and the third is neither dead nor alive. Mr. Oneal tells why and how this happened to these unions.

They are not isolated cases. Nor are they exceptional cases. In fact, what has happened to these three unions, with which the story deals, is typical of a good many other labor organizations in this country. Many of them have had the same experience with the sad result that some are no longer here to tell the tale. One union of the three in the present story failed to recognize the advent of the machine age and it spent itself in fighting a lost cause. The second union realized, but not until it was nearly destroyed that its task was not to boycott the machines, and the women in the industry, but to adjust itself to the new conditions. Perhaps the union will recover its lost strength. Let us hope that it will. The third union has ceased to be a living and moving organization and is today satisfied with living an insignificant life, cashing in on its past and going out for whatever returns the situation yields. It is doomed to final decay, however, unless it resumes a course of intelligent and effective militancy. In all three cases, short-sighted policy of either stubborn, unreasoning opposition to machine developments and to industrial conditions, or lack of incentive and prop-

erly directed militancy was responsible for the breakdown of trade unionism.

Unions are labor's reaction to the world of industry and business. As conditions and circumstances in this world of business and industry change, likewise must trade unionism change its course of action, its policies and strategies. Not only must trade unionism reflect the great changes in the industrial world, but it is obliged, under pain of extinction, to foresee the trend of these changes and to take the initiative in harnessing conditions as they evolve so that they may strengthen, not weaken labor. Drifting is no policy for labor. Labor will survive only while seeking mastery. By intelligent struggle labor will acquire power, which, however, won't descend like manna from heaven into labor's hands. Labor must fight for power.

The consolidation of trade unions into industrial organizations is inescapably suggested by the story in this pamphlet. But consolidation or amalgamation alone will not turn the trick. Labor must resort to a variety of means if it is to come into its own. The whole line of present-day labor policy must be overhauled. The outworn views of membership, of leadership, of democracy, the entire industrial and political outlook of labor must undergo a change. This change cannot be accomplished through the medium of someone wise coming to labor and telling labor what to do. Labor will not learn how to acquire power, nor achieve its salvation listening to preachments. Only through experience, through exercise and through doing can labor acquire the intelligence which is the condition of its freedom. Labor unionism is workers' education through economic action, through participation in political and other forms of labor activity. Labor must set its mind on the great question: what is to be done?

What is to be done is today as pertinent an issue to labor as it was half a century ago when trade unionism was just being established. As of old, of course, soli-

clarity remains the cornerstone of labor activity and intelligence is the major condition of its effectiveness. But conditions in this world have changed tremendously and there is nothing left for labor today but to reopen the issue and to devise weapons that will prove effective in the struggle under the changed conditions. Labor must study economic trends. Industry is to be studied. Political situations are to be studied. In these studies books are to be used as aid to actual experience. Thought and experience are to be put to use in the daily struggles of the working people. The truthful and simple account by Mr. Oneal in this pamphlet is a warning against ignorance and inertia in the Labor Movement.

The overwhelming majority of American labor still remains outside of the sphere of influence of American trade unionism. The huge textile industries of the North-East and South have not been organized. Steel is almost fully unorganized. Whatever organization there was has become ineffective. The power industry scarcely knows of unionism. The automotive industry is completely unorganized. Coal is in a state of disorganization. The unskilled workers remain unorganized. And while but a small fraction of American working men and women are organized, not more than one-twentieth, the employers of every industry are organized for defense and aggression, and they don't confine themselves to industrial lines, either. All industries are knitted together in Chambers of Commerce, in manufacturers' associations, in a great number of organizations of a variety of forms and names. Due to this power of organization and their wealth, they control the legislative assemblies, Congress, the government. They dominate the courts. They work together with the banks. They control and they exploit the meager savings of the people who toil for a limited living. These savings, however small in each case, but considering the tremendous number of working people in this coun-

try, are a source of great financial strength. Used as a basis of an intricate and complicated financial credit system, these labor savings are turned into a towering power of financial strength used by the anti-labor forces of capital against the working people of this country. They limit labor's earnings. They exploit labor's limited earnings.

What unlimited possibilities of a great life would open to labor, if an organized and well concerted Labor Movement would mobilize labor's power in the interest of labor! The Conference for Progressive Labor Action under whose auspices this pamphlet, one of many, is published, has come into being for the purpose of arousing labor to a clear realization of its own ends and aims. The C. P. L. A. seeks to bring about a unified and consolidated progressive organization of labor on the economic, on the political and on every other field and domain of social life. To this end branches of the C. P. L. A. are organized everywhere in the country and organizers and educational literature are directed wherever there is a possibility of inducing working men and women to take their place in this world and to join in the age-long fight of labor for freedom and social justice. Labor must take a decisive part in molding the destinies of the human race. The working people of this country are the nation, and short of their freedom and happiness the nation can neither be free nor happy. Write to the C. P. L. A. for cooperation and aid in the great task of making America fair, free and happy.

J. B. S. HARDMAN

I. AN IMPORTANT AMERICAN LABOR UNION HAULS DOWN ITS FLAG AND DISBANDS

The Story of the National Window Glass Workers' Union

ONE of the most tragic stories in the history of American trade unionism is that which records the fate of the National Window Glass Workers. Organized in 1880 as Local Assembly No. 300 of the Knights of Labor and adopting as its slogan "Never Surrender," it died in 1928 by official action of the remnant of the organization that remained! It had included in its ranks the highest paid workers in this country but due to its craft exclusiveness, its unwillingness to care for the unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the industry, its program of job monopoly for its members, and refusal to adjust itself to the introduction of machinery it committed suicide.

This history is recorded in the "Monthly Labor Review" of the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for October 1929. It may be supplemented by the references to the organization to be found in Professor Ware's book, "The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895," and the data contained in Leo Wolman's monograph on "The Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880-1923." Of the period of its power Professor Ware wrote:

"It controlled every factory in the United States and a number in England, Belgium, France, and Italy. The glass workers were able to maintain a standard of production of 48 boxes a week, their idea of the needs of the market, on the condition of which they were well informed. They worked nine hours a day and five days a week and had two months vacation in the

summer when the fires were drawn. Their wages were \$30 to \$40 a week for single-strength, and \$35 to \$70 for double-strength blowers. They were at this time unaffected by machinery, though specialization had crept in and under intelligent leadership they maintained standards that were impossible in other trades. Their work was highly skilled, requiring some knowledge of the chemistry of glass, the lung capacity of a prima donna and the heat-resisting qualities of a stoker. They had the most complete monopoly of any union in the country and when this was threatened by the importation of English, French, and Belgian glass workers, President Cline went to Europe and organized assemblies there."

As the wages and conditions represent pre-war standards it is apparent that they were the best obtained by any American trade union.

THE MEMBERSHIP CHART

From Wolman's study of the membership of the organization the following figures are interesting. For our purposes we begin with the peak year of 1910 which includes the period of affiliation with the A. F. of L.

Membership of Glass Workers

Year	Members	Year	Members
1910	70,000	1917	46,000
1911	62,000	1918	43,000
1912	60,000	1919	37,000
1913	40,000	1920	38,000
1914	39,000	1921	38,000
1915	38,000	1922	32,000
1916	41,000	1923	16,000

It will be observed that there has been a continuous decline in membership since 1910 except for the abnormal war years when there was a temporary recovery. When the union disbanded in 1928 it had less than a thousand members!

Since its organization in 1880 the glass workers had been divided into a number of organizations but in 1908 the four trades were united into the National Window Glass Workers which adopted the policy of "refusing to recognize the machine or to admit workers in machine plants to membership," but a few years later the cylinder blowing machine was invading the industry and other machines were to follow.

Meantime the union followed an exclusive policy in the matter of job monopoly which made it almost a family affair. This custom recalls the intermarriage of aristocratic families in old Virginia and in the Hudson Valley of New York, a cohesion of wealthy upstarts who transmitted to heirs the cult of social distinction that raised them above the vulgar herd. Membership was restricted to American citizens and apprenticeships were limited to sons and brothers of the members. Of the family aristocracy the authors of the "Monthly Labor Review" article write:

"Glass workers inherited their craft from their fathers and passed it on to their sons, and it was the almost universal custom that all the male members of a glass workers' family followed one of the four trades in the industry. Moreover, they married the daughters and sisters of their fellow glass workers."

One may imagine the pride of craft and the narrow psychology which these attitudes fostered in the organization. Having entrenched themselves into a strategic position in the industry the members and officials endeavored to make of the union an armed castle against other workers in the industry and to keep machinery out of the industry, knowing that the machine would destroy their skill and make way for the unskilled. In some instances agreements were made with manufacturers that were intended to strengthen the family aristocracy.

FIGHTING THE MACHINE

Of course, the machine steadily gained ground in the industry but the union merely made its discipline all the more severe.

"The union decreed that any member going to work in a machine plant automatically suspended himself from membership and employment in a hand plant without the payment of a fine and reinstatement fee. The sentiment generally was that the line between hand and machine workers should be definitely drawn, and that workmen should identify themselves unmistakably as hand or as machine operators. The practice of hand blowers of taking positions in the machine plants during the summer suspension of the hand plants was penalized by fines. Manufacturers who during the transition period tried to operate under both systems were refused a scale by the union."

In the year of the largest membership of the union, 1910, a situation developed which should have shown the members that they were pursuing a suicidal policy. In that year it signed a scale which provided an increase of 40 per cent above the scale of the preceding one. The American Window Glass Co. had the exclusive monopoly of a machine which gave it a big advantage over the hand plants. It began to cut prices and the union realized that it could not maintain the new scale. It was compelled to revise the scale to avoid driving the hand manufacturers out of business and wages declined to \$15 and less.

It was not the union that contributed to any stabilizing policy. It was the rival manufacturers who feared ruin because of the price-cutting who got together in a conference in 1912 and arranged a truce. Working conditions became more stable and the union was able to recover from the wage reductions of a few years before. When the European war broke out the great Belgian industry was paralyzed which gave American manufacturers a big advantage in the home

market and the export trade while the union was able to obtain wage increases in 1915-16.

The post-war years brought two new machines into the industry which eliminated two types of skill and the union was again facing a crisis.

"By 1922 the hand industry was feeling the encroachment of the sheet-drawing machine plants in two ways—in the loss of workmen, who were going into the machine plant, and in the closing down of many hand plants which could no longer meet the machine competition. One element in the union contended that to survive at all the union must adjust itself to the changing conditions and expand its field to take in the machine plants. A resolution looking toward that end, so worded as to give the union jurisdiction over semi-skilled and unskilled labor in the machine branch while retaining the skilled handicraftsmen was decisively defeated in referendum. The skilled glass workers had declared once more . . . that they were a handicraft guild and would so remain." (Labor Monthly).

PROGRESSIVE VOICES UNHEEDED

But because of the trends pointed out in the above paragraph opportunities for the union members became less and internal dissention followed. Machine production was producing glass at a cost so much lower than hand production that the policies of the union had become an absurdity. In order to hold a place in the industry the craft workers had to work longer hours. The machine revolution that was transforming other industries was revolutionizing the manufacture of glass. The craft organization was doomed but a majority of the members continued in the old ways.

The membership was rapidly declining and the last scale was signed for the blast of 1924-25 which represented a 25 per cent reduction in wages. Other con-

cessions were made by the union. The next year negotiations were made with individual manufacturers and the general wage committee disappeared. So did the universal scale and private agreements became the rule. As hand plants were driven to the wall by the machine plants members made requests to the national organization for relief and half of the union's treasury was refunded to members in 1921-22. Death was only a matter of time.

A last attempt to save the sinking structure was made by establishing a manufacturing plant in West Virginia which began operations in 1924. It operated for three years and closed in the spring of 1927 with a net loss of \$84,000.

The same year the union held its first and last national convention in Cleveland and threw down the bars but it was too late. Realizing at last that the hand industry was gone the convention "ruled that members could accept work in machine plants and still retain their membership and standing in the union, and it decided upon an intensive organizing campaign in the machine plants." An organization fund of \$10,000 was voted and the campaign was concentrated on a West Virginia plant.

"The attempt was soon given up, however, as the organizers met not only indifference on the part of the workmen but strong opposition from the management, whose unskilled workers were employed under individual contracts." (Labor Monthly).

The craft guild had for years barred the unskilled and now the unskilled were under the domination of the "yellow dog contract" and could not be organized!

THE UNION IS BURIED

Then the funeral.

"Declaring the situation hopeless and the organizing campaign a failure, the executive board of the union

met June 29 and 30, 1928, and formally disbanded. Business and financial affairs were closed, and the money remaining in the treasury after all the obligations of the union were met was distributed at \$1 per capita to the 897 members in good standing at the time of the dissolution."

The union that would "never surrender" had surrendered!

In spite of the death of this union there are still five other unions in the glass industry and their total membership is less than 15,000, the largest, the Flint Glass Workers, having but 6,900 and the smallest, the Glass Cutters and Flatteners, having only about 300.

And what is the fate of the members of the dead union? The last president of the union sent out a questionnaire and obtained information from 605 members.

"One hundred and five were unemployed, and most of them had had no work since they left the glass factories. . . . The largest single group, 193, or 36.6 per cent, is reported as common laborers; 39 have gone into the building trades and 17 into automobile and allied industries. The report gives 120, or 24 per cent, as unclassified."

Thus passed into history the leading example of a conservative union that refused to change its organization so that it would be adapted to modern industry. The last executive of the union, President Siemer, sadly remarked after the funeral:

"The mistake we made was in clinging to the old guild idea. That has no place in modern industry."

Mr. Siemer also made the point, according to the "Labor Review," that "the marked difference in the development of the industry in Belgium and the United States was in the attitude of the organized workmen." The Belgian union, always as strong economically as was the American,

"recognized the inevitable and changed with the industry from skilled craftsmanship to machine operation, and accordingly maintained its position as a force in industry."

It is also important to point out that the Belgian workers are Socialists and support their Labor Party. They draw no distinctions between skilled and unskilled. They faced the same problems which the window glass workers have faced and solved them. The American organization is dead, its members scattered, and the Belgian organization has thrived and expanded. Progressive and Socialist unionism alone adapts itself to the changing world and is practical. The old type of unionism faces the peril of decline which tends to wipe out skill and reduce labor to one common mass.

2. ONE OF THE OLDEST AMERICAN UNIONS IS FIGHTING FOR ITS LIFE

The Story of the Cigarmakers' International Union

WE have told the story of the National Window Glass Workers, organized in 1880 with the slogan "Never Surrender." It is not with pleasure that we record the fact that the last few sad years of that organization have now been repeated by the Cigar Makers' International Union. Moreover, the history of the Window Glass Workers is similar to the history of the Cigar Makers. It is a story of the neglect of the unskilled, opposition to machinery, striking changes in the industry, a steady decline in membership and now a crisis which involves the very existence of the union. It is the story of a union which gave Samuel Gompers to the trade union movement.

That we do not exaggerate is evident from a leading front page article in St. Louis "Labor" in its issue of December 14, 1929. The General Executive Board of the union was meeting in St. Louis and "Labor" reported the situation as the members of the board now regard it. The following excerpt from this article tells the story:

"The American cigarmaking industry has been revolutionized within the last two decades. No one knows this better than the Cigar Makers' International Union.

"For a long time the Union Cigar Makers stuck to the fatal delusion that machinery would never mean much in their trade, because the machine could not make a good cigar. It took many years to cure them of the delusion, and it was rather late in the day when the awakening came. It was not till two years ago, at the Chicago convention, when the Cigar Makers' International Union decided also to admit machine workers to membership in their organization. Since then strong efforts have been made to get the cigar workers in the larger factories into the fold of the International Union.

"Twenty-five years ago the Cigar Makers' International Union had a membership of over 60,000. Today the membership has dwindled down below the 20,000 mark. The powerful American Tobacco and Cigar Trust, the machine and prohibition are the three chief causes of the reaction."

Crediting the union with 60,000 members 25 years ago is evidently an error. Mr. Leo Wolman's study of the growth of American trade unions for the period 1880-1923 is the leading authority on this matter and is based upon a careful research into all available records. According to this study the largest number of members the union ever recruited was in 1909, when it reached 51,000. His figures for 26 years show the following:

MEMBERSHIP OF CIGAR MAKERS

Year	Members	Year	Members
1898	28,700	1911	50,000
1899	31,500	1912	48,500
1900	37,100	1913	48,500
1901	37,700	1914	48,500
1902	41,200	1915	39,400
1903	44,300	1916	37,700
1904	46,800	1917	41,600
1905	45,600	1918	39,500
1906	45,400	1919	36,300
1907	48,000	1920	38,800
1908	47,100	1921	34,200
1909	51,500	1922	32,000
1910	51,400	1923	30,900

From these figures it will be observed that the membership slowly increased to the year 1910 when the decline set in. It has continued to decline except for the year 1917 when there was a temporary increase of a little over 4,000 members. From that year the decline has been steady. St. Louis "Labor" declares that the membership is now less than 20,000 and this estimate is probably based upon data in the hands of the General Executive Board when it met in St. Louis in 1929.

In comparing the above table of membership with the membership decline of the Window Glass Workers an extraordinary fact is revealed. The policies of the two organizations having been the same, the decay of both set in at about the same time. The Glass Workers reached their peak in membership in 1910 and the Cigar Makers in 1909. Similar attitudes brought similar results. Another striking fact is that in the period of decline both organizations made a temporary gain in the war year, 1917, the Cigar Makers adding about 4,000 members and the Glass Workers 5,000. After this year the decline is continuous, except for a small increase in both unions in 1920.

FIRST ORGANIZED IN 1864

In both industries guild traditions and special skill run back hundreds of years. While inheritance of trade skill by the cigar maker from his father was not so pronounced as in the glass worker, it was strong down to the period when the machine entered the industry. It was the effort of both organizations to follow policies adapted to an age that has vanished that brought a crisis in the unions.

The cigar makers organized in 1864 with less than a thousand members and five years later the membership had increased to 5,800. In the decade before organization the cigar makers, like the shoemakers, were affected by a transition in the industry. This was due to the emergence of factory production out of shop manufacture. The independent shoemaker had worked at his trade either in a room of his home or in a shed nearby known as a "ten-footer." As the factory displaced the "ten-footer," the shoemaker became a wage hand employed by a manufacturer.

Shop production had been typical of the cigar industry but in the sixties and seventies the workers were also being drawn into the factory, although the shop still persisted and sweatshop production survived for many years thereafter. Then came the introduction of the mold in the seventies which brought a division of labor into the industry. What followed is related by Prof. Ware in his study, "The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895":

"The mold was a tool, not a machine in the proper sense of the word, that is, it was operated by hand and not by power. But it had much the same effect on the cigar maker's operation. It did not speed him up as much as the power machine has a tendency to do, but it did subdivide his work and break down his special skill. The old cigar maker made the bunch, molded it by hand, and rolled it. The introduction of

the mold after 1867 split up the operations into bunch making and rolling, and made it possible partially to replace the cigar maker by unskilled 'filler' or 'bunch' breakers. In 1870 the union, by constitutional amendment, ordered its locals to allow union members to work with 'filler breakers.' This meant not only that the International was opposed to the mold, but that it was to exclude all but the hand cigar makers."

RESTRICTION POLICY ENFORCED

The decision was not fully carried out and many local unions turned against the International because of this policy. Prof. Ware continues:

"In 1872 the restriction policy was carried a step further and members of the union were prohibited from working not only with filler breakers but with non-union men." (Meantime the membership declined from 5,800 in 1869 to 3,771 in 1873, the year before the panic. By 1877 it had declined to a thousand members). "The strike fund was increased as the number declined. In 1873 the constitution was amended again to allow union members to work in shops where filler breakers were employed but not 'in conjunction with filler breakers.' This meant the breakdown of opposition to the mold, but left the union restricted to the declining number of hand cigar makers."

The mold had come in spite of opposition. Those who think that officials of the unions are always responsible for such policies are mistaken. At the convention of the International in 1872 President Edwin Johnson spoke against a parochial policy.

"While we have the large majority outside of our organization," he said, "I can see but one way of accomplishing anything that will be beneficial to our trade generally. . . . Let us lay aside a little of our selfishness, make our laws liberal, and our platform

broad enough to hold all, and let us endeavor to unite the whole into one grand organization."

This advice went unheeded and not until the following year was a concession made.

This early episode in the history of the International is recalled because of what followed in later years. As the glass workers had thought that machines would never compete with them so the cigar makers thought, but what has happened in the past two decades in the industry is made vivid in one paragraph of a resolution presented by the cigar makers to the Toronto convention of the A. F. of L. in 1929. It reads:

"In the cigar and tobacco industry, machines have displaced thousands of skilled and semi-skilled wage earners. The trust owners are well organized and skilfully merged in combines with unlimited resources and influence. These trusts will not tolerate the organization of wage earners who are among the lowest paid industrial workers.

The members of the union were slow to adjust themselves to the machine revolution in the industry. The President of the Cigarmakers wrote in the "American Federationist" for January, 1928 as follows:

"It took forty years to perfect a machine which would successfully make cigars. It caused thirty-odd suicides, and cost 20 million dollars, before success came. So many failures had occurred that the average cigarmaker had an inborn deep-seated belief that it could not be done; and when the successful machine did come with sudden and unexpected swiftness, the mass was slow and reluctant to grasp the real situation, holding tenaciously to the life-long, deep-rooted belief that the only successful way to make 'em was the old hand way."

There are five powerful manufacturing companies now equipped with the latest models of cigarmaking machines. They employ approximately one-half of the

workers in the cigar industry. Nine-tenths of these workers are young girls working for low wages. The hours of labor range from nine to eleven hours a day and all of these workers are employed at machines.

PROGRESSIVES' BELATED VICTORY

Progressive members of the union, among them Socialists of many years' service to the organization, had for years urged a more liberal policy. The skilled worker was passing into history and they desired organization of workers regardless of skill. The old guard of conservatives opposed a progressive policy but the situation became so grave that it became evident that the International could not live on the old basis. In the year 1927 the progressives won out. It was decided to abandon the old restrictive policy regarding membership and to begin a campaign for organization of all workers in the industry. Negotiations are also under way for amalgamation with the Tobacco Workers' International Union.

But in the meantime the big corporations with their anti-union policy are all powerful and constitute a huge barrier to organization. By using "yellow dog" contracts and employing girls at machines who regard their employment as a temporary occupation before marriage, the problem facing the International will test the generalship of its leaders.

Twenty years ago male workers supplied 80 per cent of the cigar industry but today this is practically reversed. Three-fourths of the production is by power machines and few men are employed at the machines. The girls working at the machines are paid a wage ranging from ten to fifteen dollars per week. In the tobacco stripping departments the girls are paid even less, their wages ranging from six to ten dollars per week. It is obvious that they cannot live on such incomes which are merely supplemental to the family income.

It is obvious that the powerful corporations in the industry will strive to retain this cheap labor and fight the union. In Philadelphia there are over 10,000 workers in the industry of whom 90 per cent are girls, all working on power machines. Every shop of any size is putting in power machines as fast as they can be installed and the whole industry is now practically revolutionized. The union has for months had an organizer in the Philadelphia field and experience has shown that when a girl is known to have joined the union she is discharged. Organizing must therefore be secret work.

Thus the Cigar Makers' International Union, one of the path finders in American trade unionism, has its back to the wall and is fighting desperately to come back. It undertakes its big job with a smaller membership than it had thirty years ago and in this respect it also repeats the history of the Window Glass Workers. Whether it will accomplish its task remains to be seen. It certainly deserves all the help it can get from the trade unions of the country, for the destruction of the International would be a distressing event considering its former influence in the American labor movement.

On the other hand, there are other unions that are affected by the same policies that destroyed the Window Glass Workers and that have brought the cigar makers to their present perilous position. Other unions can learn from what has happened to these two and so change their attitudes that they can expand their organizations before weakness overtakes them. Skill is being scrapped by machines and mass production. Skill and craft should be disregarded in organization wherever possible. Plant organization and organization by industry should be the rule. Where two or more organizations can be merged they should be merged.

Consolidation and amalgamation is the rule observed by the masters of great industry. Members of trade

unions cannot hope to match the organizations of the corporations and mergers if they are divided into numerous small bands, each with its own restricted policy, each seeking a secure niche in an industry only to be eventually rooted out by machines, and all waiting till a crisis confronts them before turning to better forms of organization and more fruitful policies.

3. A POWERFUL BASIC INDUSTRY REMAINS UNAFFECTED BY UNIONISM

The Case of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers

IN these stories of the causes of collapse of several American trade unions we have surveyed the Window Glass Workers and the Cigarmakers. The former union was organized in a fairly large industry and its members, as we have seen, possessed a high degree of skill which was destroyed by machines. The Cigarmakers had been conspicuous for their hand skill rather than skill in the use of tools. As a handicraft industry located in shops and factories it rapidly emerged as a machine and mass production industry and the union, like a man wasted with disease, is now fighting for its life.

In this chapter we consider organization in the iron and steel industry, a great basic industry, one of the most powerful in the United States. The writer is familiar with the union in the industry as for ten years he was an iron and steel worker and was also a member of the union.

Before the year 1876 a number of unions had been organized. At one time or another there were separate organizations of heaters, roll hands, puddlers and nailers. In 1876 the several unions were amalgamated

but membership was restricted to the skilled who were directly employed in the iron, steel and tin departments of the industry.

UNSKILLED BARRED EARLY

Other skilled workers still retained separate organizations. Among these were blacksmiths, boiler makers, bricklayers, machinists, metal polishers and others. Even workers like myself who were acquiring skill were not permitted to join the union till we had fully matured as skilled workers. This continued to be the policy thirty years ago although it was abandoned some years later. The result was that when there was a strike those acquiring skill were expected to strike with the skilled, although the former could not share in the fruits of any victory that might be won.

Yet some magnificent battles were fought by the iron and steel workers, the most notable in 1892 when pitched battles were fought with the Pinkertons who were hired and armed by the companies. The story of that struggle is not germane to this article although in passing it may be remarked that unionism received a staggering blow in that conflict.

By the year 1901 concentration of capital in the industry had proceeded so far that the U. S. Steel Corporation emerged as the first great mass production enterprise in this country. Its tremendous advantage in dealing with the old unionism soon became evident. For thirty years this giant of the industrial world has been a warning to the labor world against continuing old types of organization and policies but it has gone unheeded. What has happened to the Window Glass Workers and the Cigarmakers and what is threatening other unions today happened to the Iron and Steel Workers more than twenty years ago.

THE INDUSTRY CHANGES

A few paragraphs from John Moody's "The Masters of Capital" give some idea of the profound revolution

in the industry effected by the organization of the corporation:

Rockefeller received eighty millions in stock of the new corporation of which half was preferred stock, besides eight and one-half million dollars in cash for his ore-carrying fleet. These were huge concessions, but the control of the Lake Superior iron mines was absolutely essential, for these deposits represented two-thirds of the new corporation.

Having thus gathered together all the important steel interests of the country, Morgan launched the U. S. Steel Corporation. The stock capitalization was in excess of a billion dollars, with a bonded debt of more than three hundred millions, and both the big banking groups of Wall Street were firmly tied to the enterprise. The great merger dominated by Morgan drew into its orbit even the Standard Oil "Money Power."

So under the control of a single corporation passed 70 per cent of the American iron and steel industry. That industry, instead of being operated on the old plan of individual control or independent corporate control, was now linked with scores of banks of great power, with railroads, and with numerous other corporate undertakings.

"Individual control" had given way to unified command not only in the production of iron and steel but in raw materials, ships, railroads, banks and "numerous other corporate undertakings." Here was an expanded and unified organization of great capitalistic interests facing an old restrictive unionism of the skilled. It was a case of modern artillery against the ancient spear and bow and arrow. What happened in the struggle between the old unionism and the new organization of capital is revealed in the following sad history.

MEMBERSHIP FLUCTUATIONS

The number of members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers has been only

a fraction of the hundreds of thousands in the industry. The following table shows the membership for 32 years:

Year	Members	Year	Members
1898.....	10,500	1911.....	4,300
1899.....	11,000	1912.....	5,500
1900.....	14,000	1913.....	6,300
1901.....	13,900	1914.....	6,500
1902.....	14,500	1915.....	6,500
1903.....	15,200	1916.....	6,700
1904.....	14,300	1917.....	11,000
1905.....	10,900	1918.....	16,100
1906.....	11,400	1919.....	19,700
1907.....	10,200	1920.....	31,500
1908.....	7,400	1921.....	25,400
1909.....	6,300	1922.....	15,900
1910.....	8,200	1923.....	11,700

The latest estimate we have of the membership is by the U. S. Department of Labor which credits the union with a membership of 11,500 for the year 1929. From the above table it will be seen that this union in one of the basic industries, a union 54 years old, has a smaller membership than it had at the dawn of the present century. Its membership never exceeded 31,500 which it had ten years ago. Like other unions of that period it obtained this increase because of the truce signed by the unions and the government during the war. Three years later (1923) the nearly 20,000 members which it had taken in during the war disappeared and it was back to 11,700.

It should be noted that the bulk of the increase in membership was due to the general strike in the industry in 1919, a struggle that ranks in importance with the Homestead strike of 1892. It had the support of nearly the whole trade union movement of the nation and it was the most thoroughly organized strike in our history. It began quietly in August, 1918, by

secretly enrolling members. The national committee in charge of the strike reported that by January 21, 1920, no less than 250,000 workers had been enrolled by the committee.

WHERE ARE THE NEW MEMBERS?

The struggle was not confined to western Pennsylvania. It spread to 41 iron and steel cities and towns in seven states, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota and New York. The enrollment included workers of all kinds, blacksmiths, boiler makers, bricklayers, electrical workers, machinists and others. What became of all these recruits to unionism?

Well, it isn't a pleasant story. Representatives of various unions involved in the strike engaged in a scramble for their share of members. Old jurisdiction disputes were raised. Executives of the Operating Engineers publicly ordered their members not to strike because they expected President Wilson's industrial conference to settle the issues. Neither Wilson nor the conference helped. The Railroad Brotherhoods displayed no sympathy for the strikers.

Worse still, the Iron and Steel Workers had contracts with various firms and union executives gave preference to these agreements rather than to their agreement with the other unions to carry on the strike. They too often ignored the unskilled laborers who were being enrolled and the latter lost faith in the struggle. In the Bethlehem plant the Steam Engineers were ordered to return to work by their officials and railway men in the plants failed to support the strike.

The Commission of the Interchurch World Movement which aided the effort to organize the men later submitted a report. Of the National Committee's efforts to cope with craft and trade jealousies the Commission declared:

The Committee struggled with ancient jurisdictional disputes between the Steam Shovelmen and the Stationary Engineers over the disposition of crane men;

between the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers and the Hod Carriers' Union over the disposition of common laborers; it argued unceasingly with constituent unions whose constitutions and by-laws threatened to bar out steel recruits. It tried to impress the wishes of the newly organized rank and file, clamoring for action, upon the absentee officialdom of the International Unions and the conservative A. F. of L. overlords. As an administrative machine the Committee never attained a remarkable degree of perfection. "This organization," one of the strike officers said, "has as much cohesiveness as a load of furniture."

The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, after a month, began ordering its men back into "independent" plants, and, after the strike, withdrew from the Committee, taking away 70,000 to 90,000 members, all of whom were recruits from the drive.

DIVIDING UP THE WORKERS

This picture of representatives of 24 internationals sitting at a council table and quarreling over jurisdiction issues, each striving to take as many members as possible, and all of them dividing the recruits into a dozen or more unions in an industry where labor must be organized as a mass, is discouraging. The strike could not avoid being a failure. One might as well expect a battle in war to be won by 24 generals, equal in rank, issuing orders. This was not organizing workers. It was dividing them.

The disputes among the generals discouraged the recruits who were looking for unity of command. Suspensions arose among the skilled, the semi-skilled and the unskilled and to this was added the suspicions of the foreign born workers who had nobly responded to the strike call. Reviewing these phases of the strike the Commission declared:

The strike's end saw the racial split deepened, many immigrants feeling that they had been "let down" by the American labor movement. Many immigrants told their leaders, "When you 'Americanize' the Americans and the Negroes, we'll strike again."

It is probable that if the unions had agreed to place all workers in each plant into one plant union the result would have been different but this plan could not emerge out of the craft and trade organizations. The U. S. Steel Corporation is one of the most powerful in the world and its unified command gave it an enormous advantage over the divided command of the 24 Internationals. Trade unionism failed. Organization by plant and industry, taking in all workers regardless of their skill or lack of skill, might have been successful.

Incidentally, it may be remarked that ten years after this defeat (1929) President O'Connell and Secretary-Treasurer Frey of the Metal Trades Department reported at the Toronto convention of the A. F. of L. that the unions concerned have reached no agreement regarding organization of the metal trades. On this point they declared:

"Unless our international organizations can agree among themselves upon a plan by which a united effort can be made to organize the workers in these mass production plants, it would appear to be almost useless to attempt organization.... We are not making any progress....under our present methods."

Making no progress in ten years. What a tragedy!

POLITICAL PERSECUTION AND FRIENDSHIP

Before passing from this tragic ending of the uprising in the steel industry it is well to point out that the strikers in all centers, with one exception, found the elected officials ranged against them. Mayors, sheriffs, police departments, were practically directed by agents of the steel companies. The right of the

union men even to meet was snuffed out. The political powers, almost wholly created by labor votes, cooperated with the steel companies in breaking the strike.

The one exception was in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, where workers for years have been placing their own representatives in office on their own ticket. Here the agents of the steel companies approached the labor Sheriff with a list of deputies to appoint. That list was rejected and the Sheriff made his appointments from members of the trade unions. Milwaukee was the only steel center where strikers could meet without being molested, where their civil rights were preserved, where there was no evidence of disorder. The contrast showed what could be done by intelligent voting.

The union survives in the so-called "Independent" plants but not all of them, and now negotiations are under way for a huge steel merger in the Middle West that will create the third largest company in the industry. The Republic Steel Corporation is the magnet around which the "independents" are gathering. Years ago the Republic mills were practically all union but it now operates chiefly steel mills and furnaces. With the exception of a few small plants the policy of the Republic is non-union. The Jones and Laughlin Corporation and the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company will ultimately become a part of the Middle West merger and these two companies are open shop. It is obvious that when the merger is completed what remains of the Iron, Steel and Tin Workers will be little, unless some striking revival of the militant spirit appears in the ranks of the workers.

OBSOLETE UNIONISM

In Germany, Austria, England and other countries the workers have splendid organizations in the iron and steel industry. In those countries no jurisdiction disputes or craft and trade jealousies disturb the unions. Skilled and unskilled find a place in the unions.

There are no dozen or more organizations in the industry working at cross purposes and sapping each other's strength by mutual wrangles and attacks. Company unionism is unknown.

The old nineteenth century unionism does not fit into modern mass industry. Steel workers abroad know this and have organized regardless of skill and trade. Here it has been a policy of drift, lack of any far-sighted statesmanship, and an undermining of the old unionism by mass industries. Both members and officials must awaken to the grave problems that confront them.

In this survey of three unions, one located in a large industry (Window Glass Workers) but not comparable to steel; one in a lesser industry (Cigarmakers) with old traditions of the guild craftsman surviving; and the third (Iron and Steel Workers) in a great mass industry, it is evident that the old unionism is affected in the same way in all these industries. As it cannot fit into the new mass industries it must change to more modern forms of organization or die.

Moreover, the workers must learn that the old form of politics and political action is played out. It does not inspire the workers and it does not scare the old parties. It is futile. It belongs to the middle of the nineteenth century. Trade unions in practically all modern nations have abandoned it. Genuine labor politics cannot be reconciled with servile waiting upon the favors of parties that represent the possessing classes, not the toilers of this country.

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